

The President's Weekly Address

March 6, 2010

This week, I asked Congress to schedule a final vote on reform that will give families and businesses more control over their health care by holding insurance companies more accountable. This comes after nearly a year of debate, as well as a 7 hour summit with Democrats and Republicans, where we had a public and substantive discussion on health care. Since then, I've said that I'm willing to incorporate some ideas offered by Republicans, and we're eliminating special provisions that had no place in health care reform.

Now, despite all the progress and improvements we've made, Republicans in Congress insist that the only acceptable course on health care is to start over. But you know what, the insurance companies aren't starting over. I just met with some of them on Thursday, and they couldn't give me a straight answer as to why they keep arbitrarily and massively raising premiums—by as much as 60 percent in States like Illinois. If we don't act, they will continue to do this. They'll continue to drop people's coverage when they need it. They'll continue to refuse coverage based on preexisting conditions. These practices will continue. And that's why we have to act now. That's why the United States Congress owes the American people an up-or-down vote on health insurance reform.

The proposal we've put forward would end the worst practices of the insurance industry, lower costs for millions of Americans, and give uninsured individuals and small businesses the same kind of choice of private health insurance that Members of Congress get for themselves. And while it will take a few years to fully implement these reforms, there are numerous protections and benefits that would start to take effect this year.

This year, small-business owners will receive tax credits to purchase health insurance. This year, thousands of uninsured Americans with preexisting conditions will finally be able to purchase coverage. Insurance companies will no longer be allowed to deny coverage to children with preexisting conditions. And they'll no longer be allowed to drop your coverage when you get sick.

This year, all new insurance plans will be required to offer free preventive care to their customers so that we can start catching preventable illnesses and diseases on the front end. There will no longer be lifetime limits or restrictive annual limits on the amount of care you receive. Young adults will be able to stay on their parents' insurance policy until they're 26 years old. And there will be a new, independent appeals process for anyone who feels they were unfairly denied a claim by their insurance company. Finally, seniors who fall into the gap in coverage known as the doughnut hole will receive \$250 to help them pay for their prescriptions.

What won't change when this bill is signed is this: If you like the insurance plan you have now, you can keep it. If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor, because nothing should get in the way of the relationship between a family and their doctor.

If we act now, all this will happen this year. Millions of lives will improve; some will be saved. Many families and small-business owners will have health insurance for the very first time in their lives. Doctors and patients will have more control over their health care decisions, and insurance company bureaucrats will have less. This future is within our grasp.

But we also know what the future will look like if we don't act, if we let this opportunity pass for another year or another decade or another generation. More Americans will lose their family's health insurance if they switch jobs or lose their job. More small businesses will be forced to choose between health care and hiring. More insurance companies will raise premiums and deny coverage. And the rising cost of Medicare and Medicaid will sink our Government deeper and deeper into debt.

I don't accept that future for the United States of America. I know it's been a long and hard road to this point, and we're not finished with our journey just yet. But we are close, very close. So I ask Congress to finish its work. I ask them to give the American people an up-or-down vote. Let's show our citizens that it's still possible for Washington to look out for the people's interests and the people's future.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:25 p.m. on March 5 in the Blue Room at the White House for broadcast on March 6. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 5 but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on March 6.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Weekly addresses.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Subjects: Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Members, meetings with President; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Health insurance claims, proposed independent appeals process to dispute; Health and medical care : Health insurance exchange, proposed; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms, proposed; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Preventive care and public health programs ; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Health and medical care : Small businesses, proposed tax credits to purchase insurance coverage; Health and medical care : Young adults, insurance coverage as dependents, proposed age limit extension.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000152.